

# THE UNCERTAINTY WAR: APPLYING ENTREPRENEURIAL PRACTICES TO MICRO- BUDGETING FOR SHORT FILMS

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## Abstract

The following paper offers an analysis of the development process of “Roof Knocking” (2017), a studio short film set in Gaza, spoken entirely in Palestinian Arabic, produced in Estonia, with a given budget of €5,000 euros. The purpose is to introduce a set of practices based on entrepreneurship principles that can apply to similar projects, serving filmmakers to build resources timely and mindfully.

Short films can prove a producer’s capacity to find and maximize resources. By implementing entrepreneurial practices in short film production, filmmakers can fight uncertainty while working at micro-budget level in Europe. The methodology used to compile the relevant data based upon the Lean Startup’s build-measure-learn feedback loop. The decisions made by the producer while projecting “Roof Knocking” are measured by risk, and later translated to budgeting strategies.

A reflection on creative industries and independent filmmaking in Europe supports the author’s analysis. The film’s value chain modification creates an arena for innovation, with easier access for new actors but facing greater competition. Project management is fundamental for the entrepreneurial producer. Applied entrepreneurship prove its feasibility in the film industry.

The producer’s intention is to offer an alternative approach to film producing that puts the budget in the background, being the support but not the core of a movie. Meditation and lateral thinking are practices to attach upon reflecting the producer’s decisions, including the ability to see beyond plausible mistakes. The vision of the producer is to propose a scheme to build productions upon resources available (tangible and intangible value), identifying and cutting costs since the early stages of development.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, micro-budget, short film lean startup, creative industries.



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## I. Introduction

Uncertainty is inherent to filmmaking. Between the conception of a premise and the very first day of production, thousands of decisions are made to bring a film into being. These decisions are complicated, as the variables change constantly, and any fluctuation can lead to an unknown amount of scenarios. To compare the positive and negative is a limitation.

Time and budget. Creativity and talent. Patience and boldness. Even luck has a role in the filmmaker's process. Which of the elements present a real opportunity and which an illusion? To isolate a unique fail-proof strategy is impossible. Each film and each filmmaker must find their way.

How can amateur filmmakers facing the same battles as professionals fight the uncertainty of the industry, and find a way to succeed?

The film industry today allows success for acclaimed Directors and producers, but also to those entrepreneurs who do great films reinventing their resources. Innovation is an active practice that can give newcomers a strategy to fight uncertainty and build a step to the next level in their career.

Aim. Shoot. Miss. Recharge. A filmmaker is like a bowman: hitting the target

is the consequence of missing it many times. Every time we fail at something and try again, we learn how to do it better. Failure is a word to relabel; mistakes can be accountable and make us better. The key is to know when and how to make those mistakes and have a better outcome. A better film.

Build. Measure. Learn. Repeat. The feedback loop is the principle of the Lean Startup methodology that proves useful while creating new products, services, and practices. Just like with the scientific method, gathering information in the field is the strategy new filmmakers need to build their projects to a better performance. Their arrows (short films) can be engineered to create a big blow.

### b. Chosen Project

"Roof Knocking" (2017) is a challenging project that started as a one-shot thriller short film about a family in Palestine, that later developed to be a nostalgic one-character led story shot entirely in a studio. During the year before the production, a series of critical decisions had to be made to resize what appeared to be a difficult film to shoot in a school.

The promising log line gathered approving nods since the very first time it was pitched, following opinions that fluctuated between encouragement and resistance. Some said it was a perfect opportunity, others that it was too heavy

to fly. Credibility and fidelity were one of the biggest concerns when putting it up against the given budget of the Master's program, and the amount of time for pre-production.

A film can happen in different ways, done by many different people, amateur and professional. This report speaks about the decisions I made, with and without approval, to deliver what was my ultimate goal: a low-budget emotional film that could change people's perception about a relevant issue.

### c. Project Background

The idea behind the story comes from real events found in a newspaper scrap that reported that in the territory of Gaza, a technique translated as Roof Knocking was being used by the Israeli forces to evacuate entire buildings from their occupants and thus establish terror and uncertainty. The calls were to warn people of the imminent bombing of the building in up to 10 minutes.

The film was meant to represent the immediacy of these calls: a tragedy that unravels in ten minutes, without cutting or expanding time to fit other narrative tricks. It was a representation of the war going on outside, only lived by a single family in one space.

The rules of the master and distribution of students within each specialty

shaped the team. The budget and time for pre-production molded the story and narrative elements. Finally, the project got produced in the studio of Baltic Film and Media School, with a budget going over the stipend provided, but worth much more. Involving an all Arab cast, Palestinian Arabic-speakers, and an international community supporting the project, relating two disconnected cultures through cinema.

#### d. Objectives

This technical report focuses on structuring the relatable elements in the film production and search for improvement using the Lean Startup feedback loop principles.

General: deliver a critical analysis of the creative process of the project, focusing on budget decisions made by the producer.

Specific: identify the key decisions that shaped the budget of the project and propose improvement practices resulting in a micro-budget production scheme.

The following questions structure the technical report breakdown:

- 1) What are the stages to analyse and how to categorise the efforts in each of them in a brief but inclusive format?

- 2) How to highlight the key decisions and translate them into practices?
- 3) Which practices can structure a production scheme for micro-budgeting?

## II. Theoretical Background

To set the parameters in this technical report, I present the researched topics and logic behind my creative decisions for budgeting "Roof Knocking." This section defines the context in which the short film was produced, narrowed down to European independent filmmaking at a micro-budget level, analyzing its value chain.

Within the European micro-budget environment, creative producing is compared to project managing. The producer is in charge of supervising the complete process from an artistic and financial point of view, holding a global vision of the process and capable of working with the variables. This ability is crucial to managing successful micro-budget film projects.

Currently, entrepreneurship and creative industries –such as cinema– have an extraordinary momentum. Entrepreneurs are attracted to the creative industries because they offer a positive environment for innovation. They both share the uncertainty and risks of creating something new, entering a highly competitive environment, and requiring

a significant development investment. However, a short-term commitment to projects makes it difficult for them to attach to the process as the producer has to do.

Entrepreneurship can be taught and learned. European schools are slowly introducing education in innovation and research orients companies to start implementing these values as an everyday practice. Entrepreneurial behavior in art students shows when searching for job opportunities by self-managing their talent rather than joining companies right after graduation. Being an entrepreneur could become the primary focus of their education: to be trained to identify and manage their value.

In film school, producers have to become project managers. They have to be capable of maximizing micro-budgets to create valuable films that can serve as proof of talent when entering the industry. Entrepreneurial practices can help them achieve just that, especially when it comes to identifying the value of their ideas and what are the possibilities for innovation.

Value perception is rooted in psychology, and so behavior can be defined and measured. For a creative producer-project manager, it is necessary to weigh the decisions to make during the development of a film to foresee unnecessary flops and aim for the opportunities that

are achievable and seem most promising.

The Lean Startup methodology offers a way of testing decisions in filmmaking. The concept of the feedback loop (build-measure-learn) can be used by the creative producer to get early validated information about the project's audience. This information allows them to consider less risky or expensive possibilities, and come up with a strategy that covers the blind spots. A budgeting approach that creates and attracts value, that is supported by facts and can be refined on the go.

#### **a. Producing in the European film industry**

Historically, European cinema has distinguished itself as an art form rather than a business. The European film industry finds its producing identity when compared to the ruling force of Hollywood. The studio system fundamentally secures its revenue by controlling the entirety of the process, investing with guaranteed formulas to see revenue return (Finney & Trina, 2015).

In contrast, European cinema gets labeled as independent, as it does not have the production security the studio system provides. Independent filmmaking has a disrupted value chain, that depends on each actor to be integrated at different levels, making it unstable and creating a bigger challenge for the producer.

Co-production is necessary and helpful for development of independent filmmaking, as long as the weighing elements are measured properly. The two main economic benefits of co-productions are sharing the hard costs of making the films, and the recoupment of the initial investments (Finney & Trina, pp.75).

Traditionally, the independent film value chain begins with the development process before having any financing or pre-sales. Production and post-production have to be secured and followed by fruitful international sale (film festivals and production companies), to then be finally consumed by a large audience.

Independent producing represents greater risks for the producer, who has to cover initial development investments and taking longer to see revenue. It presents little or no barriers to entering, but a great deal more competitors to overcome. Easier access to technology and content today enables anyone to create and distribute a film independently. Rather than a threat, it is an opportunity. Competitiveness becomes fundamental.

As described in *International Film Business* (Finney & Trina, 2015), a 'financial producer' is the one who brings together the different elements of a budget. They are savvy in creating value, knowing the potential of the story, cast and crew, as

well as possible markets. It's creative side depends much on testing the audience and fine tuning the elements in the project to take it successfully to production and distribution.

'Creative producers', on the other hand, are the ones who get involved in the development process, since the original idea to finding the attached talent that will develop the script. They are also responsible to pair a writer with a Director, and manage the creative relationships in the team. Managing egos and ideologies is often complicated. This is a key issue for the development of a project.

Frequently, creative producers come up with ideas themselves and improve them enough to approach potential talent to carry them forward. Alternatively, they can be attached to an ongoing project in search for development.

To work independently means investing in a project with high levels of uncertainty, as there is no security the project will reach its final stage and give the initial investment back. The development phase is the most expensive. Since basically self-sustaining the production during the development phase, the creative producer has to be more strict about the reality and nature of its project.

As told by chairman and CEO of Fox Filmed Entertainment Bill Mechanic,

"the key to making decisions that do not blow up in your face is to understand the aims of the film and the filmmakers" (cited in Finney & Trina, pp. 38).

A producer working independently in the European film industry with a micro-budget has to look to the entire film's value chain at the beginning of the project. Merging creative decisions with financial circumstance since the development phase leads to value-creating decisions.

#### **b. Creative producing and micro-budgets**

Show me the budget, and I'll show you the movie. – Jean-Luc Goddard

The number of films produced on micro-budgets has exponentially increased since the turn of the century (Finney & Trina, pp.120). Thanks to digital filmmaking and new marketing strategies that help support the producer's decisions, niche markets can be targeted. The value of a film becomes relative, redefined by its audience. 'Budget can no longer legitimately be used as an excuse not to make a film.'

Understanding the relationship between the filmmaker and the consumer in the digital era is key to create a successful film. The audience's characteristics ultimately set the rules for what they

consider valuable, but also set a precedent for innovation.

A micro-budget production in Europe is a projects with under one million Euros, managed independently, and having almost all of its parts brought together by the producer. The effort resembles that of a project manager (Finney & Trina, pp. 170).

The producer is responsible for managing the project from beginning to end. An understanding of the overall business plan is required. Ultimately, they can predict how many and for how long they can commit to a project. Their focus is on three stages: development, production, and distribution.

Creative producers involve in the artistic decisions while making parallel efforts to frame the idea into a production package. A producer can attach value to a project by putting together a crew, consolidating cast members, getting professional advice, showing real market interest in the project, or obtaining the attention/support of financiers.

This kind of productions flourishes thanks to innovation, creating more value out of fewer resources. Finding a more efficient way of achieving a goal with less effort, maximizing results, and making revenue. To increment the chances of success of a project, the producer must concentrate on the core

elements of the film rather than visual gimmicks and complex narrative influenced by the crew.

A great challenge for a creative producer in European filmmaking is the dominant figure of the Director. In Hollywood, the producer is the main leader, while in Europe, Directors demand control over every creative decision, often disregarding the budget. Keeping the writer and Director separate during the writing process is crucial for the health of the budget. A flexible script is a micro-budget's best friend. A producer must be careful not to become a financial slave to the Director.

"The key to successful creative management of writers and Directors is the ability to develop trust, and long-lasting bonds", (Finney & Trina, pp. 162).

Producers must manage a team based on respect and healthy relationships, as well as set clear boundaries for each role. They must guarantee the crew has the best environment possible for working. The risk of becoming a servant, rather than a leader, is imminent if boundaries are not clear. A producer must be invested completely in his project and team. The pressure of a small budget creates friction in a team that does not collaborate well. In this circumstances, a budget cannot afford people in disagreement.

The film producer has to know himself as well as how to manage a project. He should be able to see the broader picture but also be attentive of specifics and details. He is in charge of the critical areas of development: the slate of projects, research and development, the production package, finances and legal documents, attached talent, budgeting, scheduling, location managing, production crew, distribution, and marketing plan, up until the launch of the film.

"Managing the creative process and 'talent,' while at the same time trying to control large sums of money and ensure returns on investment, makes for a highly challenging environment", (Finney & Trina, pp. 173).

Creative industries follow a different set of rules than the corporate world. However, there are effective practices that applied to creative management help a filmmakers deliver competitive projects with micro-budgets.

### c. Entrepreneurship in filmmaking

Entrepreneurship is the act of innovating resources, finding ways of fixing problems or create value in less time, using fewer resources (Henry, 2009). Managing business in the creative industries comes with higher risk than others because the value of the product relies on changing and abstract characteristics that are hard to track and predict.

Among the attributes of an entrepreneur, according to Finney and Trina (pp. 149), are the following:

*[...] being results driven and often impatient; a strong need to achieve, and highly goal motivated; competitive, but able to learn from mistakes; a strong sense of self-responsibility, and a belief that they can control their own destiny; the capacity to choose and build a management team and delegate day-to-day operations where appropriate; a calculated risk-taker; an open mind towards innovation and new concepts; a talent at spotting opportunities and gaps in a market; a creative as well as a business mind, with the ability to trust their own instincts; an acceptance of uncertainty and financial insecurity; and finally, the ability to either move on from, or fold an operation and start again.*

Entrepreneurs are attracted to the creative industries because they create a positive environment. They praise uniqueness and innovation, projects often need lots of savvy to be sold, and the most important part of the job is in the development phase, where they can be valuable while working without attachment.

Entrepreneurs possess the features necessary to fight the risks and battle the uncertainty of creating a film. The profile merges creative and financial producers: someone motivated by an idea but also capable of placing it on the market since very early on. Pitching is their best domain, as well as recruiting and motivating creatives towards a common goal.

However, entrepreneurs have a short-term, goal-oriented attachment to projects, which is opposite to what a film production requires. Compromise alienates them, and their involvement in the creative process might require having immediate, secure financial return upon joining.

Creative producers are entrepreneurs, and to develop their micro-budget projects, they need to introduce innovative methods to relieve financial stress successfully. However, this proves to be tricky while dealing with others of their kind.

"Most clever people don't like to be led. This creates problems for leaders." (Peter Bloore cited in Finney & Trinna, pp. 158). Creative people do not appreciate the entrepreneurial practices as they see them as an obstacle for creativity. They know their value, and recognition rather than incentives motivates them.

Creatives are aware of their talent and know how to handle their skills. They use this knowledge to plan and persuade the commitments they prefer. They do not care about hierarchy, so they do not involve in corporation practices. They can manage their time and assume they can affect the overall direction of a project. Their network connections make them highly desirable. They require challenges to be engaged, they prefer not to be bored, and they are commonly ambivalent about being led.

Keeping communication flowing and clear, directing them through critical actions, documenting and committing to deadlines, keeping a positive way of expressing ideas, and setting realistic goals and timeframes prove to be most effective.

Motivated by appreciation rather than a high salary, acknowledging positive behavior, focusing on actions rather than promises, and awarding symbolic incentives (such as trust, tolerance, flexibility) work better as motivators.

According to EntreComp's research (Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie, Van den Brande, 2016), entrepreneurship is a valuable competence, that transforms ideas into cultural, social, and economic value. Bridging education and work is key to come to a more innovative arena. Entrepreneurship can be taught as a

framework of practices easily applicable to diverse fields.

Author Andrew Kenneth Gay in *Start Me Up* (2014) proposes the use of lean development with scriptwriting in American cinema. He describes student filmmakers as more similar to startup leaders than to industry filmmakers. This practice refocuses conceptualizing to learning, eliminating waste during the creative process. Lean screenwriting opens space for flexibility, as opposed to maintaining preconceived plans.

Entrepreneurship in the creative industries, especially filmmaking, should be an essential learning in their professional education. Graduates face new challenges but also more opportunities, as the trend is migrating slowly into supporting mobility talents in an independent scheme, which had not happened in the past.

Students become entrepreneurs when they start to commercialize their services and expertise independently: an 'accidental entrepreneurship' (Wedgwood, cited in Henry, pp. 128). Most students prefer to work on their own after graduating than entering a company, committing to short-term contracts and manage their own time while they perfect their skills. They are emotionally attached to their ideas and unable to sacrifice their vision to find means of finance.

Film producing students should prepare like entrepreneurs, with project management skills that connect them to their immediate opportunities: micro-budget productions. They should be mentored closely by experienced professionals and learn by doing, and find out how to measure their efforts into estimating and accounting value.

#### **d. Managing micro-budget films as startups**

Lean Startup is a methodology that allows entrepreneurs fight uncertainty when creating a startup. A startup is defined as a human enterprise to create a product or service in situations of extreme uncertainty. Since both definitions are broad, basically any business can undergo a lean startup revision. Eric Ries presented it in his groundbreaking book *The Lean Startup* (2011).

Based on gathering data similarly to the scientific method, approaching the audience directly, gathering feedback and interpret answers rather than following them.

Asking the right questions leads to validated learning, allowing the making of a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) shaped with the research done. The MVP is the result of the recollection of relevant data about the product and for who it is meant.



A film is like a startup: they share the same uncertainty and risk. The same strategies can be applied to the development process of a movie, helping the producer gather the necessary data to make justified budget decisions since the development stage.

The feedback loop is a method to obtain validated information by testing an idea while using minimum resources. The cycle consists of building a prototype, learn what experiences arise, and measure the results to use and create the next effort. Feedback is obtained directly from the consumer. Is a way to determine what the user wants or needs, integrate it to the product, and modify it until reaching a steady point of consumption or break into a regular business.

A producer can use the feedback loop principle to measure decisions before setting on a storyline, a final script, and even before an important investment is in place. Most importantly, the gathered information serves to test the value-cost relationship of the most relevant characteristics of the target audience, and cut away irrelevant costly ideas.

The key to relieving a budget is to implement less risky, non-costly tests to discover what the audience values most. Value perception is rooted in psychology, but there are ways to solidify the characteristics of a consumer.

According to Almquist, Senior, & Bloch in *The Elements of Value* (2016), there are 30 elements that create value, categorized in four categories: functional, emotional, life changing, and social impact. The list derives from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Providing a combination of these elements according to the industry, culture, and demographics of the product guarantees successful results.

It is wiser to nourish the strongest elements of a product than attempting to create more value by adding more elements. Quality remains irreplaceable, although this is also subject to perception. There is growing potential in those businesses creating new types of value, which is why applying this methodology can help filmmakers to break into the industry.

The Lean Startup methodology has the most identifiable variables that can be translated and used in filmmaking. It is simple and tailored to the project's needs and circumstances. The industry is already embracing it, from scriptwriting to equipment management, and it is my purpose to relate it to film producing.

A new business model can be applied to micro-budget films in which the producer can introduce entrepreneurship practices and delivering more value with less resources.

#### **f. An entrepreneurial producer**

A micro-budget can resemble a transformative business model, creating value with fewer resources, testing elements during the development phase, identifying the value creating components in the script, and prepare the project to become a venture of entrepreneurship (Kavadias, Ladas & Loch, 2016).

Teaching this competence to the crew to encourage innovation is a great challenge for creative producers. Establishing a set of rules to manage the project helps to oversee the entire process during the development stage, even before attaching to a particular idea. By identifying the underlying value available in the environment, a production is build up from reality and not wishful thinking.

A creative producer can use the Lean Startup methodology to establish parallels with filmmaking and help to manage the production, anticipating and testing decisions to take advantage and relieve stress out of a micro-budget.

This technical report uses the production of "Roof Knocking" as a parameter, identifying what entrepreneurial practices were applied, which ones could benefit a production, and how to implement good practices. The report traces the feedback loop of creating the most value with limited resources.

Filmmaking can serve as a success case to guide other creative industries to introduce entrepreneurial practices and educate the next generations to generate value on less resources, and find a structure that joins innovation and experience.

## II. The Process

The following section describes the struggles I faced as a Producer of the short film "Roof Knocking". The main challenge was creating a war film in a foreign country, in a foreign language, while within the budget provided by the program. My producing approach was entrepreneurial without intending it. After revising the theory presented in the past chapter, I discovered that I could classify the information in the same terminology and offer myself advice using these concepts.

I first relate the terms of the Lean Startup theory to a producer's practice. Two practical scopes can be considered. First, the feedback loop is present during the development process of the film: building deliverables, measuring feedback, learning how to modify the project for the next stage.

Secondly, the loop can be interpreted as the measurement of my talent as a producer: building a short film in an entrepreneurial way, measuring the pros and cons of the experience through this

technical report, learning through creating a set of good practices and budgeting scheme.

Ultimately, this report is a detailed diary to the mind of a very critical producer under a great deal of stress, caught in the crossfire of his crew's expectations, self-discovery, and doing the best out of the situation. Please refer to Annexes 1, 2, and 3 for consulting the breakdown script, budget, stipend report.

### Joining filmmaking and the Lean Startup methodology

The key concepts to understand my decisions in this report create the necessary guidelines to distinguish entrepreneurial and wasteful decisions, where the loops begin and end, what is the format of the measurement, and how to crystalize the learnings.

- Entrepreneur: a creative producer functioning as a project manager.
- Minimum Viable Product: the base micro-budget provided for the production.
- Validated Learning: discoveries during the development stage that affected the budget.
- Waste: practices that injured the budget.
- Feedback loop: building a deliverable, measuring and balancing the feedback obtained, modifying the project to meet the value needs and their impact on the budget.

### Technical breakdown format

Four main stages are revised in order to track the budgeting decisions made: development, pre-production, production, and post-production/distribution-marketing. The process starts analysing the environment of the stage, then a declaration of expectations in contrast with how things happened in the end. The measuring comes with identifying the valuable practices, and finally synthesizing the learnings in good practices.

- 4) Situation: description of the main elements to develop in the phase.
- 5) Manifesto: a personal statement about the key intentions and main expectations for the phase and deliverables.
- 6) Reality check: a contrast analysis between the expectations and the actual limitations faced.
- 7) Hidden value: a list of resources that were potentially beneficial and how they were approached.
- 8) Mind opener: the main value created during the phase that validated the following work.
- 9) Strategy: the plan generated to continue with the next phase.
- 10) Deus Ex Machina: uncontrollable elements that limited or affected the production.
- 11) SOS call: advice or counselling received and approached during the phase.
- 12) Resolution: state of the project at

the end of the phase, outcomes, achievements.

- 13)Waste: decisions that injured the budget.
- 14)Good practices: specific advice generated out of the breakdown of the phase.

This breakdown will generate a worksheet for creative producers helping to realize what elements they should take care of while budgeting, including how to identify costly production elements, where to invest the most money, where to cut off resources, how much is already in their power, tips and advice.

Each of the points in the breakdown will relate to a production scheme that helps producers to realize the most important and challenging parts of their projects. Practical aid will be given to identify the most expensive elements, what hidden values can be found, how they can use them to get support, and anticipate when and where not to put their money.

### Stage one: development

Deliverables: Log line, outline, script, and production package for "Roof Knocking".

Period: February 1st to August 31st 2016.

Location: Screen Academy Scotland; Lusófona University.

### Situation

The Kino Eyes program offers students an opportunity to create an original short film in a two-year mobility scheme, working with international talent from six different specialties: directing, producing, screenwriting, editing, sound engineering, and cinematography. The 26 students were meant to divide into six teams with one person per specialty in them to develop a short film with a base budget of €5,000 euros. The project had to have the potential to become a feature film, supported by a transmedia campaign.

During the first semester in Lusófona University (September to December 2015), the students enrolled in courses including Aesthetics and Technology, European Film Heritage, Creativity, Introduction to the Industry, and Developing and Storytelling. Previously to the winter break, all students were encouraged to pitch ideas for development during the following semester. The students would be divided into two groups: the technical specialties would head for Baltic Film and Media School in Tallinn, Estonia, and the creative specialties would follow their studies in Screen Academy Scotland.

The second semester marked the beginning of the short film development process. The curriculum consisted of two

main subjects that would help shape the project:

- 1) Fiction Film Creation: a specialty class focused on acquiring producing skills, taught by Susie Brown. The assignments included learning to break down scripts, and create schedules and budgets with the software Movie Magic. The final evaluation was the delivery of a portfolio that included a copy of the latests script, scheduled and budgeted, as well as analysis of the production as a learning log.
- 2) Graduation Project Development: a theoretical class meant to assist on the creation of the concept, log line, outline, script, and development package for the project. The course included theoretical content, imparted by Nigel Smith and guest lecturers, covering state-of-the-art information about filmmaking, developing production and pitching skills. Each student was meant to propose three ideas and commit to a team of three for the development of the project.

The team formation would also define where they would spend the second year of the master. The final assignment was to deliver a production package that included the latest version of the script, the creative proposal for the short film with preliminary schedule and budget, its film feature potential, and an early distribution plan.

After successfully completing the semester, the teams would meet again in Lusófona University in Summer School to present the final version of the production package, as well as the latest developments of the feature film script, ready to start production.

### **Manifesto**

My chosen specialty is producing. Prior to my Master's education, I had experience as a screenwriter, film critic, film festival programmer, and 1st Assistant Director. I decided to specialize in production because I consistently saw a lack of discipline in shoots. Underestimating costs and having to downsize during production; bad planning skills that resulted in uncomfortable shooting periods; unexperienced Directors abusing a crew of volunteers. Most importantly, the lack of written preparation during pre-production.

Entering the program, I had the vision to commit to a project that spoke about my personal experience with cancer: an emotional story about overcoming life changing situations that relied on good narrative and not budget to be interesting. I expected to find someone interested in the project, a Director that could help me tell my story (or a similar story). I was clear I wanted to give an extra boost to my project, so I secretly dedicated a part of my savings to the budget of my project.

My mind was open for any other promising ideas. Considering myself a creative producer, I expected to have domain over where the story would go, perhaps even co-write it. I had the experience of watching short films repeatedly, and I felt I could distinguish between the good stories and the talented students.

I also expected the producer to be the leading force of a project and this would be common understanding between the other specialties. To build a team around the idea and collaborate to make the best possible film was my best case scenario. After a semester of knowing and working with the other students, I was confident forming teams would be a simple process of logical decisions based on interests over personal relationships.

Studying film producing in the United Kingdom was one of my highest goals, and being able to do it in one of the best schools was very motivating. In comparison with Lisbon, in Edinburgh I knew the language and felt this experience could be a really good precedent for my professional career if I ever got the opportunity to come back.

My producing skills before film school came from a perseverant, logical, grounded way of thinking more than theory found in books. I intended to formalize what I intuitively knew, and learn

the language and concepts that would help me in my career.

### **Reality check**

The first semester of the program was good for bonding with the other Kino Eyes students. I participated in three productions and got to know three different Directors. When the time came in the second semester to pitch ideas and form groups, I had several invitations to join teams.

As it turned out, we were behind in choosing a story for the final project. I presented three ideas for consideration, one of them relating to cancer, but I desisted from going further after not being able to decide what my main argument was. I felt that such a personal topic was alienating or too heavy for others to join.

The Directors showed little interest in directing something else than their own stories. They had the initiative to hunt for a team before producers did, and it had a tint of a popularity contest. I gave into the game, as I felt privileged to be able to choose who to work with.

The story about the bombings in Gaza presented by Sina Salimi, Director, had a great deal of attention and that was the validation I was looking for to select. Even as I was deciding, it bothered me to let these decisions be made by the

Director instead of myself. We joined Lucas Abrahao, screenwriter, with whom we had worked previously in the course, producing a scene exercise of his authorship.

Together, we set to develop the idea into a log line and an outline. An early draft reads:

Palestine, 2015. A five-year-old receives a phone call alerting the imminent bombing of his home. His inability to comprehend what was said will impede him to deliver the warning to the rest of the family.

Upon preparing the first draft of the development package and the first draft of the script, I faced the demands of such a production. Along the common positive response of the people we presented the concept to, there was the imminent question: how are you thinking to do this film? Two possibilities arose the strongest: either shoot it in a Middle Eastern country, or fake it somewhere with a good Production Designer.

Before dealing with this production puzzle, I had to manage the writing of the script. The deadlines of the course were very close to each other for the drafts. We did not have an idea how to tell this story truthfully, and the Director became demanding to co-write, at the screenwriters expense. There was a sense of lack in the story, felt the Director, that

our brainstorming sessions had not covered.

We wanted to be sensible to the topic, so the thriller sensationalist angle was discarded. The film needed to push the hopelessness of the situation, while showing our vision and skills. On top of writing the script, a conversation hovered regarding technical aspects. Breaking the fourth wall to alleviate the tension, and doing a ten-minute long shot were implemented into early drafts of the script.

I had a sense we needed to avoid being political, religious, critical or insensitive. Our multicultural perception of the facts influenced the names of the characters, the actions, dialogues, and values. We aimed to have the approval of those closer to the conflict. When the second draft of the script was ready, both Lucas and Sina were enthusiastic to shoot in a country like Morocco, Jordan, or even in West Bank in Palestine.

I did not need to make a preliminary budget to figure out €5,000 was not enough to take the team to another country, shoot for a week and back. Finding financiers seemed like a long shot. I could not handle a crowd funding campaign with the other responsibilities of the course. And personally, I believed this story could be told better with a small budget.

For the first delivery of the production package, I conformed a simple, meagerly formatted document that included some of the intentions of the production. The most relevant was the proposal for conforming the other half of the team. Again, the decision of who we would invite to the team was dominated by the Director. I wrote the names of the people discussed in the package without approaching them first, and without knowing no other team had picked their technical crew.

Conversations held by both Director and screenwriter with the technical team set the preamble of conforming the teams, but it created a climate of mistrust and confusion. The relationships we established in the first six months in Lusófona University was now weak, and the approach did not consider their opinion but who had selected them to be in the teams.

The rewriting of the script shifted characters and genres as I developed the first budget on the second draft of the film. With five characters, a three-year old child among them, the story evolved within a single space, with the shadow of war coming from the streets outside. I researched for group price tickets, locations that could serve as accommodation, production companies and equipment rental in the Middle East. Doing a travelling guerrilla-style shoot seemed to be the best option.

As the second delivery contained the visual package, I took the opportunity to build a rich production package using Keynote. A presentation instead of a document seemed more digestible, allowing better space for pictures and the possibility to add active links. The package also presented the preliminary schedule and budget for the film in *Mov- ie Magic*: a six day production in Morocco with an estimated cost of €15,000.

Upon pitching the idea to guest lecturer John McKay, he discarded the idea of needing to travel to another country to shoot a one-location short film. This feedback served me to support my conviction of doing this film with the set budget. Following the presentation, writer and Director decided they wanted to explore different routes and storylines further. I complied, with a hidden certainty that our current storyline would be the final one. They would also suggest that we chose Lisbon as the production country, even though the rules of the program and the team configuration had ruled it out.

The third and final delivery of the production package in Screen Academy consisted on the visual package with a schedule and fitting budget for producing “Roof Knocking” in Baltic Film and Media School (BFM), Estonia. The production dates set were November 13th to 20th, 2016. With two months before

Summer School in Lisbon, the team separated for the summer.

Before disengaging in summer vacation, I decided to visit the technical team in Tallinn and get to know the school. I was in time to help them with their shooting exercises, having the opportunity to see the equipment and facilities, as well as the people. I was convinced it was the best scenario we could get for the production.

By the time we were back at Lusófona University, almost two months passed without having a single conversation about the project. We rushed to prepare the deliverables. One hour prior to the presentation, the Director approached me to say we should aim to shoot the short film in Jordan and move the production to February of 2017.

The three of us were good at pitching, but during Summer School we performed perhaps our worst. I was infuriated by this sudden change of plans, and I publicly retaliated the team for being segregated. The Director had this notion that we were keeping our possibilities open, so he also intended to change the entire story once again. Only this time, we were against the clock stepping into pre-production.

### *Hidden value*

Co-producing Screen Academy short films: as part of the Fiction Film Creation subject, we were assigned to assist other film MA students shoot their projects. The connections made could have served to reach war supportive organizations in the UK.

English-speaking Middle Eastern actors with visa: During the casting process, our best options for the films were second generation Middle Easterners living in the UK, that could speak both Arabic and English, and were able to come to Europe without a visa.

Palestinians in Edinburgh: As we developed the script, we did not search for Palestinians living in the city that could fact check the story. They could have also introduced us to Palestinian homes, decorations, and culture. Most importantly, we could have tested what aspects of our project were more relevant than others.

Development marketing/crowd funding: Social networks proved very efficient for gathering the production needs. Promoting the development process of the film online through Instagram or Facebook could have started a fanbase that served to find allies, and serve as validation of the idea.

Audience reception: The project was highly discussed inside the classroom, but somehow never reached other students. Testing the reaction to the story with other people could have brought valuable feedback to figure out which group finds the story interesting and why.

International sponsorship: financing for plane tickets, accommodation, catering, equipment could have been approached if the project would have set to produce in the BFM studio since before arriving.

### ***Mind opener***

Script drafting: Even though rewriting the script several times seemed like a waste of time, every delivery brought us interesting elements that were later reflected in the final script. It also gave me the time to be on board with the story and find a personal motivation to carry the project forward.

Shooting strategy: the production plan and budget showed that the film could be done without going over the given stipend, and could adapt to either a location or studio.

Pitching: the team had great chemistry while pitching, the concept of the film was understood and very little suggestions and changes arose.

Visual package: the images selected were strong and clearly communicated the intention of the film.

### ***Strategy***

The script should be revised and locked as soon as possible, as we could not advance to casting and location scouting without the final details. The complete team should be put together, as well as equipment tests.

### ***Deus Ex Machina***

Between Edinburgh, Lisbon, and Tallinn: Scheduling and budgeting a film to be shot in a country I had no knowledge about was a real challenge. The team configuration also had locks upon the people that could be in certain teams: the Portuguese and Estonians could not be in their country and receive a scholarship. Being five producers and six projects, one would take two projects. Lisbon would host two teams and Tallinn, four. And so, our team was automatically meant to go to Estonia.

### ***SOS call***

Vicky Patterson: A script Editor from Aberdeen coached the team on story development and pitching. Her input was really valuable, as she helped us realize some blind spots from an outsider's point of view. She also oriented me on how to work and mediate the

relationship between the Director and screenwriter that was becoming problematic.

Razan, Lana, Ahmed: During our stay in Screen Academy, we became acquainted with three Palestinian persons who happily offered their input. Razan Madhoun is a film Director from Gaza, married with two children that at the time were being held in the country. She was helpful shaping the story with family dynamics and religion in the country.

Lana Haj Yahia is a Palestinian actress starring in "Last Days in Jerusalem" (2011). She was introduced to us by our teacher and was our first option as main character, and conversations with her surrounded everyday life in Gaza. Her name served as the final name of the protagonist.

Ahmed Shaban is a Gaza student at Tallinn University who approached me during my visit to BFM after overhearing me talk about the film. He volunteered to speak about the topic, and some other war experiences he had escaped from to be there sitting talking to me. Their insights were crucial to me to feel secure that we knew what we were talking about.

### ***Resolution***

During this phase I successfully developed: A working production package

with a reworked script, visual package, and a preliminary schedule and budget in *Movie Magic*. All while collaborating in two short film productions for Screen Academy.

### **Waste**

**Dominating Director:** Allowing the Director to move the process forward was a mistake. Often times I felt it was not in my hands to put a stop to it, but the team certainly resented it. I am still uncertain of what I should have acted to prevent this from happening.

**Rewriting drama:** Unnecessary confrontations and team dynamic infested the writing process. The pace of the writer and Director was different, as well as their approach to writing. While the screenwriter preferred to work alone and have revisions, the Director wanted to sit with him and supervise the process. This created arguments that were brought to me separately.

**Miscommunication with the technical crew:** The uncertainty of how the films would be put together and the pressure to deliver within the deadlines kept us from thinking of how the others in the team would come on board to the project. They were also not considered to pitch ideas, and when picked, they had no way of collaborating with us on the building of the package.

**Disconnecting with the project:** I took a two month vacations before reconnecting with the project again before production, and to this day it feels like a mistake. Even though I had to fly back to Mexico for some time, it would have been wiser to head early to Tallinn and start pre-production. This breach also affected the team relationship and created a backlash when it was time reconnect.

### **Good practices**

- **Choosing a project:** A creative producer must feel he owns an idea he is developing, even if it comes from someone else. Otherwise it feels like employment.
- **Building a team:** A creative producer has the right to decide who is in crew and for what reasons. He is responsible for allowing other members to choose for him.
- **Research and idea crafting:** Before a single log line is put in place, a creative producer must be clear about the value that surrounds him. Locations, actors, country, language, culture, networks, funding. This background should influence the decision to take an idea forward and for who.
- **Scriptwriting:** Keep the Director away of the screenwriter, allow him his process, unless the former agrees with sharing the credit. Any other way is demeaning.
- **Scheduling:** Be prepared to create deadlines for deadlines. Creatives like a balance of pressure and freedom.

The creative producer must know how to trigger the work in his team, and how to stop it when it is time to stop.

- **Budgeting:** The first step to making a budget is a script. Anything before that is an estimation, which can provide some sense of security, but ultimately has to be adjusted. Question the script's creative decisions that seem unnecessary. You can use this estimation to pressure the team to make creative compromises. Do not assume because it is their project too they will invest their own money.
- **Early marketing:** Share your creative process through social media. Use hashtags. Interact with people that could help. Keep in mind the six degrees of separation theory. It is amazing how many people are willing to work on something they are passionate about for nothing (or almost nothing).
- **Testing:** Pitch your work to as many people as possible. Break the team's bubble. Be open to hating their response. Do not take everything as a fact. Recognize what part of the story is most interesting to them and focus on it.

### **Stage two: pre-production**

**Deliverables:** locked script, two art council production packages including sound, editing, and cinematography references. Production plan, final budget



and schedule, studio and equipment bookings, distribution plan, and shooting confirmation.

Period: September 1st to November 13th, 2016.

Location: Baltic Film and Media School.

### Situation

The second year of Kino Eyes was dedicated to the production of the six short films prepared in Screen Academy Scotland. Students should fix their productions in two time slots provided by the school: November 2016 or February 2017. The first semester consisted of three subjects intended to integrate the pre-production of the projects:

- 1) Short fiction development and production: A specialty subject in a round table format dedicated to production issues, taught by Anneli Ahven. Producers met twice a week to discuss the pressing matters in their productions and find advice to solve them. Individual sessions offered support in specific needs and questions.
- 2) Research and development for final project production: A thesis writing class imparted by Jarmo Valkola, in which the students would present and discuss their dissertation projects. The subject offered a space to explore different topics in an open

forum format, hoping it would influence the work of the students.

Students would prepare two shooting exercises, adapted scenes from their short film, with the objective of familiarizing with the booking system of BFM. They served as style and narrative tests, putting the teams together at work for the first time.

Each team should put together an entire cast and crew, transform the presented visual package into technical decisions and planning. The producer would present their work two times for green lighting before production. Art councils were to be held in October 6th and 27th for the first groups, and each represented a significant advance in pre-production.

The documents presented consisted of the final script, the schedule, and the budget. Confirmed cast with recorded interviews, complete list of crew, equipment bookings, shooting calendar including preparation, rehearsals, light and camera tests. The students should also sign an application to obtain a project number in order to get access to the €5,000 stipend.

The number would also be used for bookings in the Digital Center and access to the warehouses of the school. Students would have to deliver their

documents and art council materials to the BFM Production Center head to record the advance on the projects, helping the students to manage the spaces and permissions necessary for production.

A calendar for post-production was delivered since the beginning of the semester, marking the students should present a work print of the projects shot in November on January 17th, 2017.

### Manifesto

After delivering a convincing production package, I intended to arrive to Tallinn and start pre-production by searching for a possible shooting location. A flat or house we could manipulate to look like we wanted, and maybe even use as accommodation for the cast. We should start casting online, sending emails to agencies and joining Facebook groups of actors in the Middle East. Another option was immigrants in European countries that could speak English and Arabic with a Palestinian accent.

I would pay for transportation, accommodation, and meals to the interested cast members. If the actors were able to pay for their transportation to Tallinn, I could offer symbolic salary. The same would go if we would find a really

talented and recognized actress to play the main roles.

I would also need to find all the Arabic-speaking people living in the city. Search for as many allies as possible to put the pieces together. I would have to find other international students, store owners, religious leaders, parents with their children in the park. Anything that could serve.

My budget had a designated amount for bringing Arabic decorations and clothes from the nearest country possible. Finding a Middle Eastern Production Designer would be ideal, but an unexpected significant cost. Our best shot would be to find the perfect location, with an architecture similar to the houses in Gaza (a restaurant, a bar, an old house with a theme), and manage with a local designer to do the job. Not finding a space big enough to move around with the Steadicam, we should sacrifice the long sequence ambition.

For completing the crew, I would rely on each head of department to find their own subordinates and confirm with them that they would work without pay. Meals and credits would be the retribution for their help.

Two weeks before the beginning of production, actors would arrive and rehearse with the camera and lighting departments to set the choreography,

wardrobe, makeup, and rehearsals. We would shoot in six days, trying to manage several trials with the Steadicam during the first part of the day, and shooting security takes with fixed camera as backup. At the end of every trial, we would take notes and improve accordingly.

#### ***Reality check***

The pre-production of "Roof Knocking" started with the rewrite of fourth draft of the script. The story changed substantially from a family dynamic to a single character drama with elements of fantasy. The Director had the intention to explore this storyline since the end of the previous semester, and it seemed like a more fitting scenario for the conditions before us. The log I came up with reads:

Gaza, 2014. A mother struggles to leave her home as she receives a phone threat giving her 10 minutes to leave. What is lost when the bomb hits?

We prepared a scene from the new version of the script for the first shooting exercise. It was my first time working in a studio. Mart Raun introduced this assignment to us, saying there was a set in construction for us and that we could speak to them to let them know our production needs. The set was made by bachelor students. Additionally, wardrobe and props could be borrowed from

a warehouse that belonged to the university.

We did a group visit to an acting school to find the cast. Part of the assignment was to do the scene in Estonian. We approached two actors who were previously friends and had an interesting chemistry. Producers visited the warehouse and discovered that items could be borrowed in return for helping to clean.

A day before the exercise the set was incomplete. I assumed the students would shape the design according to our stories and finish in time for the shooting. It turned out they volunteered to help, and we were supposed to help build it as well. Later we would find out that bringing props and costumes for the exercise was not mandatory.

After processing the confusion, the Director and Cinematographer explored the space and tested the most demanding aspects of the film: doing a long shot with a Steadicam. The choreography influenced the lighting setup and required coordination with production assistants for practical effects. The new script also included a flashback fantasy sequence with a complete different mood, lit only by practicals.

In the six hours allowed for the exercise, we shot several runs with the Steadicam and the fantasy sequence. In the editing

room the most relevant issues were the sound design and the sense of space in the shots. 'Editing on set' would be necessary. The acoustics of war proved to be more complicated than expected; the exterior had to be fine tuned to avoid escape the flatness of the room.

The screening of the exercise came with important feedback. Working on a three-minute long shot proved very difficult and discouraged the Cinematographer and Director from attempting doing it all the way. A shorter long shot would satisfy them to cover the phone call. A power cut served as a cut to the fantasy sequence. The melancholic tone soothed the tension of the first sequence. The actors got the text right and the emotions we were looking for were there.

Around the same period we needed to confirm the teams and shooting dates of the short films. The first budget stipend could only be obtained after submitting the forms. We agreed 75% would be transferred to the producers before production, and 25% upon delivering the expenses report. This would also grant us a production number we could use to book equipment and rooms. The conversation reanimated postponing the shoot for February of 2017.

The assignment offered some answers but made the team uneasy about moving forward with the deadlines proposed

since Edinburgh. The Director felt that the script was still far from being final and so he could not focus on planning. The Cinematographer was insecure about the time he needed for preparing himself to perform his best. The Editor thought that it would be really difficult to find a place where to shoot and make it look real. The sound designer felt he needed some real location recordings to build a convincing design. We had two months until production. I knew it was enough time if we all got to work.

My security was not enough to convince the team. They thought a letter to the Kino Eyes board could get us a prerogative to shoot in 2017, or at least gain us a couple of weeks more. I was clear that the dates were planned this way because of equipment availability. If we changed the dates to any other, we would lose the support of the school, and we did not have the money to afford that.

The Director blamed me for taking this decision by myself, and asked me to write the letter and work for what he wanted. I felt it was unnecessary, so I declared it within the letter. After struggling with the issue, we got a meeting with the program coordinator of BFM to discuss the topic and find a middle point. The Director did not show up to the meeting so I decided I was not going to invest more time attempting this.

I arranged a meeting with my producing teacher and sat down with the crew. She made it clear that there was no other option for producing than the dates set. I drafted a weekly plan for the following two months and asked them to estimate how much time they needed to be ready. We filled the calendar with their estimations and it fitted the timeframe we had. Still uncertain but convinced there was no other way around it, they carried on to solve their issues.

This discussion gave me security to execute my plans, but a trace of doubt kept lurking: could they be right?. I needed to prove myself it was possible first. My first attempt was to find the Middle Easterners of the city. I figured that the university would be a good place to start. I spoke to the coordinator about putting a flyer or poster in the campus' boards, and she recommended I tried posting something on the Erasmus Students group in Facebook.

I put together a casting call using the Palestinian flag, using the log line and announcing the three main roles. My best hope was to find someone with advice or living in the city that we could include as non-actors. I posted the ad in the Tallinn University Facebook page, and searched for other similar actors pages. Casting agencies in Tallinn and Helsinki had no profiles like the ones we were looking for, but I still sent an

email asking for help. Facebook would become a major tool for the production.

The visual package prepared in Edinburgh served to pitch to Production Designer. The school provided a list of candidates, professionals and students from other academies. Tallinn has a very well connected network of filmmakers and artists, as they all at some point are involved in a BFM project. Mouth-to-mouth recommendations are very accurate. However, getting clear answers and having people drop out unexpectedly happened more than once.

Out of the names on the list, Kristjan Suits was the one other students suggested was best for our project. He had worked in major productions in the country and was then working on a production in the United States. Getting in touch with him was difficult, but the Director got him on board. We would meet on his arrival to settle the budget, but he told me in advance he was willing to do it for free if there was a good investment in the design. He would also take care of the wardrobe. I felt reassured someone of his talents thought it was a worthy project.

He strongly suggested we chose to produce the film in the BFM studio and build a custom set, as remodelling a home would skyrocket the costs. We settled the booking of the studio for November, but the Cinematographer

and Director were skeptical about its size. They felt we should find a bigger space to have more freedom to move the camera around. The other studios in the city were either too expensive or fully booked for Christmas commercials during November.

The BFM Production coordinator, Toomas Sääs, estimated that for the building workshop they spent €1,200 in building the set. The school could provide the essential materials. He estimated that for building our set I should double the price. I set the budget for Production Design to €2,500 (50% of our money), including a salary for Suits.

It was our best option: free materials, fully equipped, connected to the school, near the city, no need for transportation, plus extra time to rehearse and plan the shots, and it was already reserved for us. I felt a big part of the production was secured.

The Facebook page ad in the Tallinn page was slow in getting responses. After a week, someone shared with me a piece of information that became one of the arteries of the film: there is a mosque in the outskirts of Tallinn. I headed there on the spot, certain that this was the miracle I was hoping for. The Islamic Center was closed that Thursday.

A car was parked outside. A man came to me and asked if I needed something.

I shared with him my intentions. He said on Fridays there is a weekly prayer and a lot of people come with their families, some of them with kids. One or two families from Palestine. I remember my heart lifted while standing in the snow: could I get all I needed in one place?. The man was called Souhaib, he was Turkish, and he offered me a ride back to city.

"Why do you want to talk about this?", he asked me on the way back. He was interested in films and quickly connected with me. He gave me his phone number and arranged to meet the next day for the prayer. I arrived to the center and was received with a big smile. "Come in! Welcome" said the man at the door. I ascended two flights of stairs with racks of shoes. People were washing their feet in open bathrooms. The colors of their skin were nothing like mine. They looked like common citizens in a space they felt sacred.

This was the first time I had been in a mosque. Estonia is not a religious country, so a place like this felt like a sanctuary. The bright colors on the walls, posters, and carpets were the disguise of rather plain rooms. The prayer started and the men started to arrange in rows. I could not find Souhaib, so I would just follow what they did and try to be respectful. Someone sat on my right. I felt his gaze. The ritual started: I repeated the phrases and did the bows.

The prayers were said in Arabic, Estonian and English. A pastor and an assistant took the microphone to give announcements. The man besides me whispered: "Are you newly converted?". I said no. He inquired further and I explained I wanted to learn more about the culture and find help for my film. He asked if I would have a coffee with him. I accepted, sure that I was being led to what I needed.

He assured me I was not being picked up or kidnapped, but that he was really curious about me. He said his name was Omar Elhussieny. We got into his BMW and went to have lunch to the Ülemiste mall. We had a three hour conversation about religion, war, living in Tallinn, and people with bad intentions. He said that I could find the help I needed in the center, but I had to be sure of my faith, as people would attempt to convert me.

Omar became my best friend in Estonia. He advised me to come back next week and he would introduce me to the people responsible. I attended with the Director and met the main speaker, who was very open to helping us. He said we could take whatever we needed without asking anything in return.

The casting ad was getting a lot of support and shares. People were approaching me to offer their help, offering casting services for free, and advice of specific people to approach for the

roles. I had a tip for a Palestinian teacher living in Tartu for the role of Kareem. I received over a dozen recommendations for Lana, from London, Germany, Finland, and Jordan. A woman from Abu Dhabi sent pictures of her son, as we were keeping the gender of the child open to availability of actors.

The log line of the project was like a magnet. Some people with experience in Hollywood sent me their CVs for costume design and acting. Amir El-Masry ("Rosewater", "The Night Manager") was in talks to play the role of the father. A Palestinian story shot in the Baltic was a very attractive premise, and soon the crew was put in place.

Getting a local to help was essential. Kertu Viira, a producer acquaintance to the Editor was interested in helping. I approached her to be my production assistant. Her help was invaluable. She was my voice in Estonia, as she knew everyone and every place in the city. She agreed to work for free and took on the responsibility to get catering for free.

The first art council on October 6th required us to present our strategy for shooting and the key decisions taken. The script was undergoing the final edits, our visual package was translated to strategies. We had an attached Production Designer but we were missing key heads of department. The casting was ongoing and proved to be effective. The

most pressing matter was to design the set.

The architecture background of the Director was really valuable to create a first draft of the space. Using the studio blueprint, a first sketch was presented to Kristijan Suits. We sent the visual references, along with pictures we gathered from the Internet and from personal collections of our Palestinian contacts. He took the process onwards, building a maquette and coming up with the layouts for the builders.

Suits was self-resolved and seemed to understand the concept well. He got discounts for building materials and kept communicated with Toomas Sääs for the logistics of the building. He was resistant to some of the Director's requests regarding building bigger spaces, and wasting materials for unnecessary effects. Since he was working for free, he expressed he wanted to keep control over the design.

The script required the protagonist to look anguished and crying for weeks. Eventually she would be covered in dust and with a cut in her hand. After our first makeup artist quitted unexpectedly, my assistant suggested someone through Instagram: Sigrít Villido. I offered her the post with a payment of €100 for the project, with a €30 advance for purchases.

The Cinematographer built his team and mentioned we needed a good gaffer. Tiago Carvalheiro, the “Sleepless” producer, had an agreement with a friend of his to come from Lithuania and work as gaffer right after our shoot. I agreed to pay for his extra luggage and a commission for both films. An unpredicted expense of €340.

Prior to the second art council in October 27th, the casting process narrowed down, in spite of the Director’s disappointment for not having more time to wait for more actresses. He was satisfied with Sameera ElAsir, a Jordanian-English actress living in Amman, who performed in the Cannes-awarded film “Dégradé” (2015). She was willing to arrive since Thursday November 10th for rehearsals, makeup and wardrobe tests, and return on Monday 21st. Her ticket was €670.

After weeks of no notifications, someone replied to the ad in the Erasmus Facebook page. Her name was Lara Ziyad. She and her daughter, Leila (9 years old) were living in Estonia until December and they were interested in helping with the movie.

I arranged an interview but the girl’s seriousness discouraged the Director. Lara explained they lived isolated as she was attending university and Leila spent a lot of time alone. I thought play dates and a visit to the school could make her more

comfortable. I was sure she was the one. Her first script reading convinced us.

The options we had for the role of Kareem were all willing to join. The trouble was to find someone who could do a Palestinian accent. As production came closer, we decided to give our Tartu contact a try. His name was Alaa Zubaydi, a refugee children’s English teacher. The contacts that had helped us so much through Facebook turned out to be his best friends, including Lara. He was around the same age of the character, but he had never acted before. He was honored to help without charging. I offered to pay his trips to Tartu (€20 euros each), taxi rides, and meals.

The day of the 2nd art council, we presented a full cast and crew, building plans, a maquette, a schedule and preliminary budget. Two weeks before production, the most complicated aspects of the film were covered. Even though everything seemed to be working out, we were about to face some critical issues.

The Production Designer could not give me a straight answer about who the builders were, how the materials would be transported to school, and the exact building schedule. A previous structure was standing in the studio by November 5th. Suits asked for an assistant and assured five days and six people would

be enough to finish. I planned meals and snacks accordingly.

I learned that our project was taken as the building workshop task, and that bachelor students were in charge. Fifteen volunteers would help in their spare time. The materials were going to be delivered by vans that were not contemplated.

The crew was expected to know basic carpentry and help with the building. Since we were not allowed to use power tools, we were in charge of heavy lifting, cleaning, and painting. This was a huge time and energy effort. The bachelor students were enthusiastic and I rewarded them with meals and snacks. This created an unexpected cost of around €250.

On Friday, November 10th I checked in to the Airbnb I had booked for the cast. The price was €475 for ten nights. Fully equipped, two private rooms, five minutes from BFM. I picked Sameera from the Airport and Alaa from the bus station and took them to rehearsal. Lara and Leila joined them later. The Palestinian family was together for the first time.

They translated the script to Arabic and did table readings. Makeup tests took place, followed by light and camera tests. The set was finished by Saturday and pre-lit on Sunday. The preacher from the Estonian Islamic Center

offered his van to transport the decorations to school and back as his gratuity for talking about his culture.

One final problem blew up in our faces: we relied on Sameera to pick some dresses from Jordan (€70) and none of them worked. By some mistake, the dress the Production Designer made was five sizes too big. It was Sunday 6:00 pm. The 1st AD offered a dress she had bought on a trip to Morocco. It fit perfectly. We were ready.

#### ***Hidden value***

Premise: The log line and the place of production made the project unique. It was unprecedented for both Middle Easterners and Estonians. The promise of the experience was the most valuable currency for building the pre-production.

Local network: Estonia's small industry is well connected and supportive. Talented people were up for the challenge as they saw it valuable for their portfolio, and simplified navigating the city to find the resources necessary. They felt safe to call for favors in the name of the film.

Online community: The support we found on people in Facebook was overwhelming. I cannot express how helpful it was every share and like in casting ads. It helped skipping agency filters and find people with good intentions, in many disciplines, ready to collaborate

and be part of the film in return for involvement.

Intention: The amount of people who believed the story mattered opened all the right doors and made it to all the right ears. Tapping the right vein came with a lot of gifts. The Islamic Center and all our Arabic contacts not only offered their resources, but their blessing. This was very empowering.

Cast: Their connections and drive to get the film done the best way possible was overlooked. The relationship built between them became latent on screen and added to the story.

Specialized crew: Gathering experts in each field made everyone focus on their part.

Top quality equipment: As Kino Eyes students we were privileged to special bookings of the best equipment of the school. Technical features of the film are relevant and can be communicated as value.

#### ***Mind opener***

Production design: Having a professional on board lifted a huge pressure off our shoulders. The visuals were secured.

A united crew: Working with motivated people created a strong bond that was

solely standing on the worth of the film. A good team spirit naturally flourished.

Rehearsals: The crew had the opportunity to get familiar with the space and move around before the shooting. This made them feel confident about executing their plans.

Spirit: The actors understood each other and there were no frictions. Their off-screen chemistry was very promising. Expectation was very motivating.

#### ***Strategy***

The shooting plan consisted of six days, from Monday 14th to Friday 18th, in 12 hour shifts from 9:00 to 21:00. We would shoot chronologically, working only with Sameera the first two days and bring the cast for the last three days. Saturday 19th and Sunday 20th would serve to collect the equipment and deliver to the next team, and dismantling the set.

#### ***Deus Ex Machina***

Changing the dates: The binds from the school to time frames made the production to be set the way it was. It could have not changed even if we had decided to go to Lisbon instead of Estonia, unless I became producer of two films, none of them being Roof Knocking.

BFM rules and regulations: The learning curve had to be assimilated with

the pre-production, and it threw the balance off the plans in several occasions. Room and equipment booking was often messy, deadlines were not clearly communicated. An overall dissonance between what they said we could do and what we could actually do.

#### **SOS call**

Anneli Ahven: my producing mentor had a very pragmatic way to solve problems, and kept encouraging me to make the team commit with the plan. She was gentle to deliver hard information, she was a great mediator between us and the school, and genuinely interested in my producer potential.

Hillar Indla: an experienced student that assisted the Kino Eyes producers with their projects. He would attend every of our classes and come up with solutions to our problems. When the time came to build the set, he became Kristjan Suit's assistant.

Gonalo Galvao: I turned for support to my Lus3fona mentor when the extension letter was being drafted. He had been approached by the Director and felt we had a good case. I confronted him about this because I felt he was going against the efforts I was doing to convince the team to work. At the end of the conversation, he encouraged me to continue working and take care of the group.

#### **Resolution**

The production package was completed successfully. We had two exercises shot that proved our vision. A clear schedule, the final script was translated to Arabic, an Arabic flat built, fully decorated and lit. The crew was complete and enthusiastic. There was time for actor and technical rehearsals. The budget was under €5,000.

#### **Waste**

Writing letters: The time spent on trying to get an extension was really stressful and had the team in hiatus until getting a response. It would have been better to not engage in it and work.

Exaggerated predictions: Some of the estimations I made in Edinburgh were unrealistic and had too much or too little considering. This differences in the end worked out, but could be dangerous in other circumstances. This was most evident with food and taxi fees that were not contemplated.

Self-doubt: Not being able to lead the team on was a matter of security. The negativity of the team had me reconsidering the deadlines and expectations I had for the project.

'Having more': Allowing more time to write the script, to look for the cast, to find the proper crew, to have the perfect

location, was ultimately a waste of time. In almost all regards, the best option presented itself very early on and was not accepted until there was no more time to search.

#### **Good practices**

- Locking the script: The script must be locked before going to pre-production. Circumstantial changes are allowed, but endless rewriting creates uncertainty for the other departments. If by this point there are still doubts about the story, it is not time for pre-production.
- Continuity: The crew looks up to the Producer to lead the process and ask all the questions. It's important to keep the team on the loop about changes and developments to avoid lagoons. If you are disconnected, so will they.
- Sharpening the premise: The log line is your presentation card. Say enough about the story but keep the most interesting part for the imagination. Every word should be meaningful and irreplaceable.
- Meetings, chats, emails: Establish a clear, easy to follow communication dynamic. Keep formal conversations in formal channels. Chat rooms make people lazy, so use them for urgencies. Handle files exclusively through email and online storage. Make formal meetings only when necessary. Do not underestimate the conversations during cigarette breaks.



- Casting assistance: Get a volunteer casting director to handle meetings, emails, calls, and online interactions. Keep in touch with the process to spot opportunities.
- Supervising departments: Meet with every head of department and clarify their responsibilities. Have the crew know the hierarchy and address the proper person when in doubt. Do not cave in to alarmist claims that are not your department. Do not believe what one department says about the other. Get clear answers and communicate them further.
- Count your blessings: Be mindful about the resources and opportunities around you. A film is a collaboration; asking for help is not a weakness. People are willing to do the things they like the best they can when given the chance. Give people the chance to participate instead of treating them like employees.
- Networking: Communicate what you are doing and what you are looking for. Humans are problem solving machines, highly dependant on approval. Have online and offline presence. Understand the importance of making small talk, compliments, favors, attending events, giving likes and shares. People have to like you before they are willing to help you.
- Intension: When you set your mind on a goal, your mind trains itself to look for a specific outcome and the alternatives are invisible. Approach people

without an agenda. Show genuine interest in them. After all, they will dedicate a part of their life to your project. Listen to them and be as honest as possible. Vulnerability is very attractive.

- Including your audience: Imagine who your audience is and approach it. Have them pallet the concept and contribute. Make them feel part of the process rather than test subjects. People are more motivated when they feel wanted instead of needed.

### ***Stage three: production***

Deliverables: call sheets, schedule, shooting plan, shooting material.

Period: November 14th to 20th, 2016.

Location: Baltic Film and Media School.

### ***Situation***

A five-day production was in place, with 12-hour shifts from 9:00 to 21:00. From Monday 14th to Sunday 20th November, the BFM studio would be the center of the shooting. Students should notify their designated teachers, who would visit the set and supervise everything was in place.

Students should keep the door of the studio shut. The 'recording' light should be the turn on and off accordingly. Unrelated people to the shoot were forbidden

to enter the studio. The exits should remain clear; equipment should keep the emergency route free. Same for the fire extinguishers. In the case of using the steam machine, the help desk should be notified to deactivate the alarm. The first-aid kit should be replenished.

Equipment must never be left unattended. Using the iron curtain in the studio for keeping the camera and lenses was recommended. All equipment must be checked out and returned in working condition. The deconstruction of the set should happen after the last day of shooting, and all materials should be placed in the warehouse, leaving it ready for the next team.

The Producer should fill out the Stipend Report format and deliver to the head of the production to justify the expenses made and claim the remaining 25% of the budget designated.

### ***Manifesto***

Production would extend from Monday to Friday, without breaks. Saturday would serve to wrap up equipment and bring down the set. The studio should be cleared by Monday morning. Call time was set to 9:00, as we did not depend on light conditions. The gaffer should arrive and arrange the lights for the first scene of the day. The camera should be ready to rehearse by 11:00 and bring

the actors at that time for wardrobe and makeup.

The most difficult part of the shoot, the long sequence, would have two days to get the best results possible. At the end of each day, the material would be backed up and the shots selected to get the first cut as early as Friday. Saturday could serve as a pick-up day if necessary. The crew would be responsible for handling the equipment willingly in and out of the warehouses.

### ***Reality check***

We began a few hours behind. Even though we managed to pre-light the day before, the Director and Cinematographer were not sticking to the storyboard and shot list they had prepared. There was a lot of discussion between them, trying to balance in movement and coverage. The 1st AD was more on the Director's side than on mine, and her background on cinematography made me think she was getting invested in their conversations rather than moving the project forward.

For the practical effects, we had to gather people from our course to help, especially when it came to the long shot. I handled moving the walls myself, while others were in charge of practical lights, or moving with the choreography. It was a frustrating process, especially regarding sound as many times the signs in

the door and the recording light was not respected.

One of my main concerns was that Leila would suddenly shut down or become uncomfortable with so many people around her, expecting her to deliver. I planned that she would be there only the necessary time, and she should be in contact only with the Director, 1st AD, and Alaa.

To my surprise, the cast was very united and decided to live in the Airbnb together during the whole shoot. Leila turned out to be very interested in the entire process, refusing to leave even after her scenes were over. I kept company to Lara when things were going slow, and she was also happy to have friends in the city. The still photographer was around enough to capture their relationship and the mood of the shoot.

The crew was working at speed but found that while the discussions were happening with the shots, the team dedicated themselves to eat, see their phones, or have other conversations. These distractions were difficult to dissipate. Issues with props disappearing or being misplaced also caused some stress.

The food was handled by my Production Assistant, who would timely receive it and make sure it was ready on time. The had energy bars, organic juices,

bottled water, sandwiches and snacks from our sponsors. The meals were varied and satisfying. Lunch breaks were usually animated with conversations and good mood.

On Thursday, a conflict about how to merge shots with the Dolly stopped production for around 45 minutes. I confronted the AD about it, and it created friction between us. The crew was also slower than the previous days. I found out that she had decided to wrap early and give a free day to the team to refresh. We would finish the shoot on Saturday.

The Editor's assistant had been backing up the data and putting together a first cut of the film. It seemed we did not need to reshoot anything. We wrapped on Saturday at 19:00 and started dismantling the decorations, equipment, and set. The team was joyous and decided to have a drink before going out of school. The party extended until midnight, and a security manager came to ask for the one responsible for having alcohol in the studio. Apparently, the alarm had triggered because some doors were left open.

The following days we showed up to help take back the decorations to the mosque. The cast and crew were satisfied and bittersweet about saying goodbye. Everything seemed to have happened in an instant.

**Hidden value**

Promoting the shoot: Our films were the one to start the production season in BFM, and my producing teacher raised the film to a journalist to make a coverage of the movie. Unfortunately, the Black Nights Film Festival was at the same time, and all the cultural space was already covered.

Helping hands: Kino Eyes fellows would volunteer to help in the production doing practical effects, painting and decorating, or assisting the light and camera departments. Having supporters made us less tired and able to keep up with the schedule.

Food: A satisfied crew was able to get to work more quickly. Although having too much of it make people eat all the time or get distracted easily. Nonetheless, they highly valued to be taken care of and not spending their money.

Breaks: The one day break we managed to put together the editing of the film turned out to be very positive. The team felt sure the shots were perfect, and everyone rested and came new to the last day of the shoot.

Still photography: Having someone in charge of doing professional photography on the film gives formality to the shoot. It creates the opportunity to see

people working in their environment, and shows the spirit of the production.

The set: During breaks, people would ask to come in and see the set. Unfortunately, it was not allowed, but it could be a good way of promoting the film and the school.

Bonding: For a crew of highly talented people to get along and show up five days straight with the best of their availability should not be taken for granted. Interpersonal relationships affect the outcome of the film.

**Strategy**

The work print of the movie should be in place by Sunday 20th of November. The following two weeks would be designated to reach a final cut on December 15th. After the winter break, we would rejoin to edit sound, do color grading, and finish by the first week of March to be able to submit to Cannes Film Festival.

**Deus Ex Machina**

Studio availability: The management of the school presented several unexpected noyances: people would come to deliver materials to the warehouse unannounced; claim that they needed to borrow essential equipment during our shoot; ask if they could use the studio during the time we were not there.

Program restrictions: Each team had the same amount of time for shooting. Since we shared the equipment, we should collaborate and support our schedules.

**SOS call**

Fortunately, this phase flowed without the need to ask for help.

**Resolution**

We were able to shoot a ten-minute short film about a Palestinian family, including one four-minute shot, with a full Arabic speaking cast, shot with top quality equipment, in an international crew, within the given budget.

**Waste**

Abandoning the plans: Director and Cinematographer ignored their previous plans and decided on the spot if they liked their shots. It was time and energy consuming, as they would have to solve the shot first and then communicate to the rest of the film.

Creative discussions on set: The talks about how a shot should be in front of the whole crew made people uncomfortable and created a sense of disconnection between the people ready to shoot and the people leading.

**Time lagoons:** Crew members found the discussions as an excuse to do toilet or cigarette breaks, talk on the phone or use their phones. Precious minutes were wasted waiting for this behavior to stop.

**Purchases:** I handled the shopping necessary during production week, and it took a lot of time. Being away from the base brought some uncertainty and unnecessary tiredness.

**Practical effects:** Some of the things we needed to achieve for the shorts were never rehearsed and took a lot of time to get right.

**Eating:** Replenishing snacks and beverages was counterproductive and costly, as people were stress-eating. I decided to stop spending on meals that only generated trash.

#### **Good practices**

- Communication on set: Establish a method to communicate with departments. Require each head of the department knows how to get information to the Director. Avoid having background conversations that can filter and create confusion. Misinterpretations cost time.
- Location rules: Include in the daily emails the reminders for the set rules. Leaving rules to common sense will cause unnecessary frustration.
- Punctuality: It is essential people take

their calls seriously. Come up with reprimands for tardiness and reward effectiveness.

- Strategic allies: The 1st AD must be as much an ally to the Producer that to the Director. They are meant to administrate time and make sure the shots are completed.
- Resting: When working long shifts, it is better to allow a free day to refresh the energy. Resting could help execute better challenging scenes and give the team the to strategize the following actions.
- Shooting plan: Respect the compromises you made in pre-production. The storyboard and shot list help contain the schedule, and the team should have a solid reason to take an alternative route. Rethinking every decision creates confusion and burns out time.
- Catering: Get someone to manage it for the whole shoot. Feeding people is a sensitive issue when working under pressure. Consider the money necessary to nourish your team. Catering can be solved by finding sponsors for each couple of days. Vegetarians should have options available. Avoid greasy or spicy food. Get good coffee.
- Wrap up party: Find a way to appreciate your team with drinks or an informal gathering. Do it preferably right after finishing, as schedules and wrap up happen quickly. Be sure to thank everyone personally for their work.

### **Stage four: post-production, distribution, and marketing**

**Deliverables:** work print, final sound mix, final color grading, DCP export, HD export, distribution plan, digital production package.

**Period:** January 1st to May 15th, 2017.

**Location:** Baltic Film and Media School.

#### **Situation**

Students were to present a work print on January 17 showing the basic editing of the material recorded. Each team would receive an equal amount of studio time to work on the editing:

Editing: 3 weeks per film (120 hours)

Sound editing: 2 weeks per film (80 hours)

Sound mixing: 1 week per film (40 hours)

Color grading: 1 week per film (40 hours)

For color grading, the particular days would be given, and an assistant will be present in the DaVinci room. All other bookings are up to the students.

The final short delivery is May 15th on HD quality, and on June 15th in DCP for the graduation screening. Along with

the digital file, the complete production package should be on Google Drive, including a distribution strategy.

### ***Manifesto***

Part of my intention about shooting the film in November 2016 was to be able to start the film festival circuit quickly. I estimated that the movie could be done by the end of March latest if the deadlines and times of booking were respected. We would make the biggest effort to deliver an integral work print in January and finish editing to be ready to apply to Cannes.

I would create film festival plan and complete online submission platforms profiles to be ready to apply. I would build a press kit and social networks to promote the short and build a fan base. We would be able to finish by April and focus on the other deliverables of the master.

### ***Reality check***

After a successful shoot, the energy in the team dropped down to a minimum. The Director had some business to attend unexpectedly and left Tallinn in early December. The absence left the editor hanging to know how to proceed with the cut. The goal of having the final cut by December 15th was not accomplished.

Winter break ended, and I returned to Tallinn at the beginning of January 2017. The team had plans to arrive only until

the 15th, which created a negative atmosphere for the presentation of the work print. The Director started to be dissatisfied with the results of the plans that we made in pre-production, as well as the work of the Editor and Cinematographer. He started editing, reframing and color grading by himself, in spite of the crew.

The presentation of the first cut had us feeling uneasy, but feedback said the film was almost where it should be. We needed a better way to stitch reality and fantasy. The Director wanted time to experiment with the cut and make more versions. After three weeks of getting no results and skipping deadlines, I selected a cut and pushed it to be taken as final.

I delivered the film to Cannes Film Festival as a work in progress, but we were not selected. I dedicated a couple of days to research all the most prestigious film festivals, dates of submission, premiere conditions, fees, and which platforms they used to receive movies. I made a document with a pool of festivals and a roadmap to follow. Only the film was still two months from being completed.

The stipend report was put together around the same time, only to find out the Production Designer still had some unreported purchases, putting the project €405.13 over budget. However, an estimation of BFM's equipment and

editing facilities contribution made the real budget €43,287.13

The grading process for the work print was tortuous, as the Cinematographer and the Director could not agree: the first wanted to color as he had prepared, the second wanted to reduce everything to shadows and forget past plans. We booked our week for the color to discover the supervisor of the DaVinci room was gone, and we could only get a couple of hours with an editing teacher. The results were not enough to the Director, who demanded a professional to do the job.

I went to my producing teacher and told her about this, and she made an agreement with her professional Color Grader to take the project. Surprisingly, the Director decided to leave for two weeks immediately after, without giving notice. The Cinematographer did the same one week later, so the sessions were postponed until three weeks later. In the end, the results were excellent.

The sound proved a more simple process, as the Sound Engineer preferred to work on his own and come to the room only to mix. He managed to do this over two weekends, and the results were easy to deliver. Credits and subtitles were in place, and the final copy was ready to test as DCP on May 11th, 2017.

### ***Hidden value***

Editing facilities: The access to the editing rooms was not limited, and we were able to experiment and correct mistakes quickly and without any further costs.

Outsider's opinions: Showing the film to other students and strangers gave us the perspective of what people thought was most important, if the story was understandable, and what were the priorities in storytelling.

Festival deadlines: Having a film festival in mind can create the right pressure for the team to work together and motivated, even if it is a long shot.

Recommendations: Going to my teachers for assistance broke the chain effect of not being able to keep the team in line. Bringing results alleviated the pains and frustrations temporarily.

DCP export: The facilities allowed us to have a professional file within a few hours and without any extra cost to the budget.

### ***Mind opener***

Completed project: We managed to deliver the film respecting the rules of the master, gathering some positive reviews along the way.

Test screenings: We were able to screen the short film in a state-of-the-art screen and do changes before submission.

Film festival run: The HD copy is ready to be uploaded and submitted to film festivals.

### ***Strategy***

The official presentation of the films is June 20th at the BFM Supernova theater. The film should be uploaded to Vimeo, signed up to Withoutabox, Film Freeway, and Festhome. A web page/fan page should start to gather some attention and share production details that make the film interesting to their audience. A solution must be found to send DCPs to festivals. Submissions would run until December 2018.

### ***Deus Ex Machina***

Unexpected trips: The personal plans of the team were not shared with the Producer in time to modify deadlines. This created issues with the timelines proposed in several occasions.

Overbooked studios: The students dealing with final projects during the end of the semester was high, and the restriction of bookings per project was limited to four eight-hour consecutive shifts.

Energy flow: The technical department had to deal with two teams, and the friction generated since the development process seemed to arise again and create a complicated process. The team

was frustrated, and it was hard to find a way to make them engage again.

### ***SOS call***

Margus Voll: The head of Icon Studios took our project and offered to color grade it for free. He also managed to give the team notification that the productive conversations had to be dealt with before coming to work with him. It helped me channel the discussion about the grading, as I was inexperienced in the field and failed to project how much time the process would take.

### ***Resolution***

The war film "Roof Knocking" was shot with top quality equipment, in a custom built set, completely in Arabic, edited, sound mixed, and color graded with state-of-the-art software and facilities in Tallinn, Estonia; with a film festival plan at hand.

### ***Waste***

Several cuts: Allowing alternative cuts without any apparent direction cost three weeks that created frustration in the team.

Broken communication: Issues were usually addressed to me directly instead of to the head of the department to which the problem corresponded. It

was time-consuming, confusing, and only created tension.

**Hierarchy:** The Director was taking over the technical crew and modifying the film to his liking without listening to them created distance and dissatisfaction with the process.

**Scheduling:** Giving tight deadlines was not putting pressure on the team to finish since the semester was still running and we had no other priority than this project. The open schedule allowed too much time to experiment and not make decisions.

#### **Good practices**

- **Post-production workflow:** A good plan not only includes a schedule but the rules for working together, revising, exporting, and sharing files. Good manners and understanding of the team's formula for working must not be taken for granted or forced into what the industry presents if it does serve the process. No sound or color grading until the final cut is done.
- **File sharing and reviewing:** Screenings are better than seeing films individually on computer screens. Adding a time code can help facilitate the process. Name the files and promote proper labeling in the editing files.
- **Feedback:** Share the early cut of the film to an audience and get impressions on essential elements. Do not get involved in their answers or worry

that what they want will not be available for the film. Keep their opinions as pure as possible.

- **Final budget:** After completing the film and managing finances, acknowledge favors and sponsors. Quantify the amount of hidden value that served your project. This currency will help promote the movie further.
- **Film festival plan:** Submission deadlines motivate the team. Make a plan separating the A-list festivals from the ones with open premiere status. Select the profile that better serves your film. Ask around to find connections to film festival insiders and get contacts to send your film directly. Prepare a great press kit and support it with an online presence, sharing the most valuable things in your production. Build a fanbase that programmers and festivals can consider. Show them your audience.
- **Post-production & distribution costs:** Include since development a €500 minimum amount for film festival fees and materials, and propose and find sources of getting post-production services on discount or free. External deadlines can also make the team settle the editing more quickly.

### **III. Analysis & Proposal**

#### **a. Key budgeting decisions**

Retracing my steps into the most critical parts of the "Roof Knocking" production

allows me to emphasize the five most relevant aspects that shaped the budget of the short film:

- 1) **Story:** Choosing a premise that fits the producer's abilities within financial and creative reach for the time frame set for the project.
- 2) **Cast & crew:** Selecting the correct team members based on talent and compatibility. Approaching actors that contribute to the process rather than just performing.
- 3) **Location:** Finding a space that can accommodate the production, affordable, manageable, and completely available for the production needs.
- 4) **Budgeting:** The exercise of recognizing the most demanding elements of a production and visualizing strategies to nourish them or substitute them. Careful planning with timely rearrangement of value as the process advances.
- 5) **Production strategy:** The practice of gathering the planned resources to guarantee the shoot will accomplish its creative goal.

#### **b. One-page micro-budget workflow**

Using this five axis and the good practices mentioned in the previous technical report, I present the first attempt at a one-page production workflow for micro-budgeting a short film.

Eck & Leenhouts's The One Page Business Strategy (2014) introduces four steps to create a simple communication tool that summarizes the goals and projections of an enterprise. The core methodology presented is OGSM (Objective, Goal, Strategies, Measures), a template that helps develop a business plan while documenting the most valuable parts and how to obtain them.

Kaufman declares in The personal MBA (2012) that there are 12 forms of value; a film classifies as a product, which can be sold for more value than from what it was created. The Pricing Uncertainty Principle –all prices are malleable– sustains the idea that a film can be seen as valuable if the proper attributes are attached. A micro-budget film production can use its features to allure more value without necessarily investing more resources.

Finally, The Lean Startup's methodology helps identify the loops between each phase, the key deliverables and return points to help producers figure out limits and reconsider their strategy.

The Micro-Budgeting Workflow should be understood as an ongoing format to consider since prior starting a production. The entire scheme serves as a global indicator of where hidden costs and values are before reaching those stages, and at the same time, a current status analysis tool for budgeting.

### ***Phase 1: Script development and scheduling***

Storyline: Two-sentence description of the story and concept.

Wording must express genre, tone, style, and the personality of the project.

It is the foundation of the project, should not be changed lightly.

Can be used in pitching as the official way of referring to the film.

Have's: a realization of all the valuable assets at hand that can help the project.

Initially available money, equipment, facilities, locations, acquaintances, social networks, props, costumes, catering, actors and performers that could be interested in the project.

Have'a represent the majority of the resources used for the film.

The resources should shape the storyline and style of the movie.

Need's: the key elements of the story that cannot be replaced.

Everything that can imply a considerable cost to bring to the big screen.

The heaviest departments will shape the budget of the film.

Specific locations, props & costumes, make-up, visual and special effects, actors, copyrighted material, consultants, translators, crew members.

Core values: the heart of the film.

Motivator: the central moving force of the project. Relevance, recognition, challenge, morals, altruism, education, technology, commerce, marketing, among others.

Value Proposal: the heart of the project. The innermost purpose of the film. The ultimate message to be delivered regardless of form.

Goals: three different objectives of the film. Regarding profession (impact in the film industry), social (how the audiences could perceive it), and personal (milestone in one's career)

Emotional investment: the amount of time and energy, boundaries and limits of the producer towards the project. Setting rules and dealbreakers are necessary to protect your performance.



Budget estimation: a first informed attempt to put together a budget. Use the Core Values and Motivators to give priorities to each department.

The objective of the first phase is to finish a locked script from which to start budgeting.

### Phase 2: Scheduling

Value vs. cost analysis: a contrast between what an expense is worth and it's importance within the story.

Research real prizes of the Needs, based on a schedule.

Set a price to the things that are at hand and count it as part of the budget.

Find a way to minimize the elements are costly and don't represent a real benefit to the story.

Best/Worst-Case Scenario: preparing for what may or may not happen.

Planning for possible outcomes of not being able to satisfy the central Needs against Having more elements show up unexpectedly to help.

Blocking costs: designating the percentage of the budget, Have's and Need's,

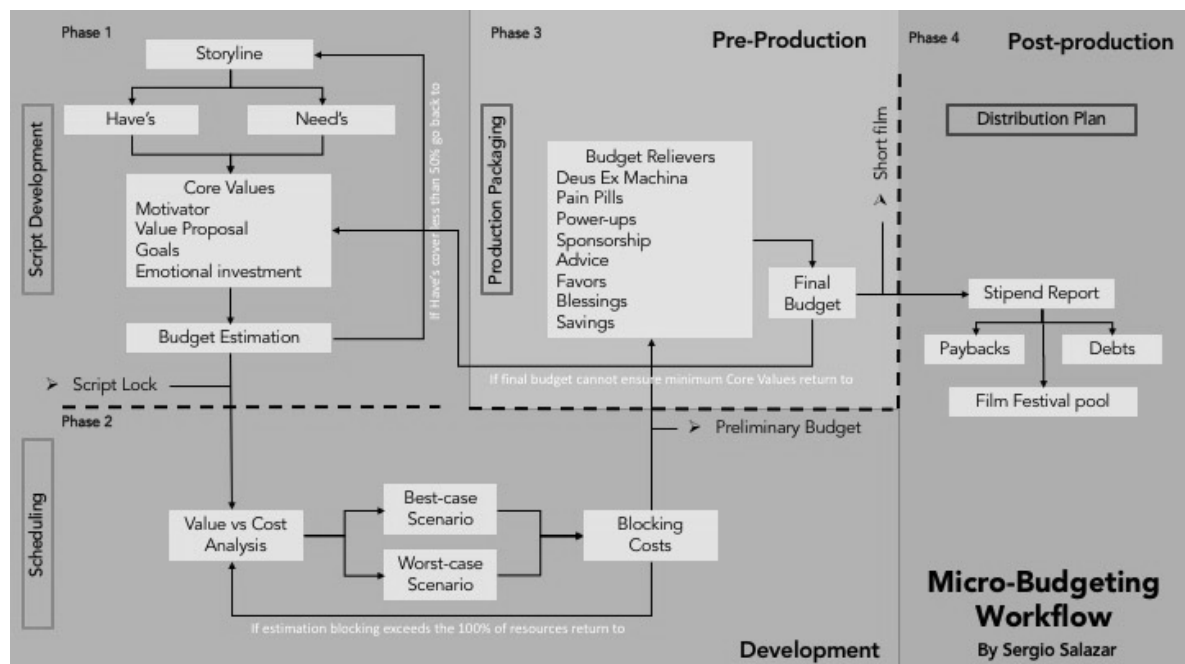
that correspond to each main expense or department.

The objective of the second phase is to have a preliminary budget based on a schedule.

### Phase 3: Pre-production

Budget relievers: how to alleviate the budget while undergoing pre-production.

Deus Ex Machina: all the circumstances that shape the production and are unchangeable.



Pain pills: solving easy-to-fix problems that might accelerate the process.

Power-ups: encouragement or approval gathered from other strategic decisions that can empower the team to work more efficiently and add further value.

Sponsorship: the calculated approaches to key funders or interested parties for the sake of the project.

Advice: the knowledge that was not revealed previously or until the production is under process.

Favors: conscious contact with powerful entities that are willing to participate without committing or asking for revenue.

Blessings: the opposite to Deus Ex Machina, the circumstances that benefit the project that could not have been foreseen.

Savings: personal investment towards giving the production a necessary kick.

Final budget: the real costs gathered through the process. The final document to advance towards production.

The objective of the third phase is to produce the short film.

#### ***Phase 4: Post-production, distribution, and marketing***

Stipend report: a formal document presenting all proof of expenses and justifying a final budget. It should include help realize what elements are missing or brought unexpected costs:

Paybacks: accounting and coming up with ways to return favors and sponsorship provided

Debts: accounting for delayed payments and unexpected costs during production.

Film festival pool: a list of potential festivals, strategy, and fees.

## **IV. Conclusion**

Creative producers can benefit from entrepreneurial practices when working at a micro-budget level. The practices help to find and assess the value and use it to produce an intelligent product that they can use to break into the industry, mainly by existing within film festivals and attracting further attention towards developing a feature film.

It is the creative producers' job to communicate and implement these practices in their productions, although it

requires evidence to support its results. Managing the resistance is part of the development process, and the success of the project depends on it. Evaluating my decisions through this report made me realize what my entrepreneurial practices were and how they succeeded or failed within the project.

As a film producing student working with a micro-budget, my intention for the Kino Eyes program was to present a quality film that depended on storytelling maximizing the resources available. My personal input was to introduce a production practice that allowed the team to be as active as they preferred but in an understanding of roles and hierarchy. I find that leaving these matters undisclosed caused an intricate friction between my intentions and those who were only looking at the creative spectrum.

The workflow proposed as the digestion of my learnings is the guidance that I wish I had as a producer in this process, and all the elements I wanted the team to consider while producing the short. I find that not sharing this vision since the beginning was a mistake, as it was to choose a team based on personal relationships and praise than to my integrity and mind.

Rather than regretting my decisions, I found a way to advance and finish to the best of my capacity, while rescuing

the valuable pieces. They mark my contribution to filmmaking and open a path to the next step in my professional evolution.

## V. References

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